

I am grateful that we are debating this bill. I am also grateful that this bill will be subjected to an amendment process. We have a lot of work to do. The first thing we should do is to make sure that employers are not subject to liability simply because they want to care for their employees. Together we can make this a true Patients' Bill of Rights bill. I am committed to having a solid piece of legislation sent to our President for his signature.

NOMINATION OF J. STEVEN GRILES

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I am very concerned. The Energy and Natural Resources Committee has oversight of the Department of the Interior. As a consequence, we have had the responsibility of holding hearings on the nomination of various individuals for the Department of the Interior.

It is rather ironic that the only individual at the Department of the Interior who has been cleared by the Senate in its entirety is Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. We have had a situation with regard to the Deputy Secretary, Mr. Steven Griles, that deserves some examination by this body.

Mr. Griles was nominated on March 9 by our President. Hearings were held on May 16, as I chaired the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He was reported favorably out of the committee by a vote of 18-4 on May 23 of this year. All this was prior to the switch by Senator JEFFORDS who made his announcement on May 24. At that time, we immediately began to try to move the nomination. The minority also tried to get a time agreement.

According to the information we have from the floor staff, Griles was cleared on the Republican side on May 23. In an executive session on May 23, we did move one nomination. On May 24, we moved 19 nominations. On May 25, we moved 33 nominations. On May 26, we moved 8 nominations. In each case, Griles was cleared by the Republican side but objected to by the Democratic side. I wonder why.

During this period, a unanimous consent agreement was offered to allow for 2 hours of debate and a vote—the Democratic side said they needed 2 hours—with consideration the week we were to return from the Memorial Day recess.

That was again rejected by the Democrats, as was a modification that deleted the time certain and only included the time limitation. At that point, it was clear that the Democrats would control the floor and the timing on our return.

Yet in executive session on June 14, we cleared three additional nominations, but the Democrats would not clear Mr. Griles. Why?

As of today, Friday, June 22, Mr. Griles has been pending for 30 days without even a time agreement. Even if the majority leader wants to hold con-

sideration of further nominations hostage in the sense of organizing resolutions, an agreement on time for debate has nothing to do with the resolution and the actual scheduling of the debate.

Who suffers by this politicizing? Obviously, the Department of the Interior as a functioning body, and the public whom the Department of the Interior serves. We have a new Secretary, again, the only person down there who is confirmed. She needs help. I encourage the leadership on the Democratic side to let this nominee go. He has not been nor is he a part of the general holdup on the other nominees because action was taken on him prior to the change in the leadership in the Senate.

I am kind of amused by some of the comments of my colleagues on the other side who indicate a puzzlement, saying there have been no attacks on Griles. They simply have said all the nominations are on hold while the Senate reorganizes because of the switch of the Senator from Vermont.

I think the explanation I have given is not only accurate but gives thought to some of the excuses we have heard from the other side as to their justification. There is no justification.

ENERGY

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise to discuss a matter I know is very close to the interests and the heart of my colleague who occupies the chair. That is the issue of energy.

As we look at energy in view of the calendar, it is quite obvious that while energy appears to be the No. 1 issue in the minds of most Americans today, it certainly is not on the minds of the leadership in the Senate body. Energy is not even on the calendar.

It is my understanding, after the Patients' Bill of Rights, we will probably go to a supplemental. We may have the minimum wage, any number of things. Energy is not on the list.

I can only allude to what I assume is a political evaluation that somehow the Democrats are better off not working in a bipartisan manner to address the corrections that are going to be needed to bring about relief from this energy crisis but would rather object to any action being taken as they blame our President and his association with the energy industry as the cause of some of the problems associated with energy in this country.

When you think about it, you might say the Democrats are waging a war against the prosperity and freedoms associated with the character of this country.

The character of this country, to a large degree, is directly associated with a standard of living. That standard of living is based on affordable energy and a plentiful supply. Energy really powers our Nation's freedom, our national security. It gives us the flexibility to live our lives as we choose, to pursue our hopes and our

goals. Energy powers the workplace, moves the economy, moving it forward and bringing all of us along with it.

As we know, as evidenced by the polls, the energy supply and price of energy are all part of the energy crisis in this country. Supplies are threatened, costs are rising, and the resulting crisis is undermining our economy.

When an issue of this magnitude touches so many families in so many ways, Congress simply must act. We must do what we can to help provide solutions to the crisis. But now with the change of leadership, what we seem to have on the other side is a lack of interest in even including energy on the agenda. We have asked the Democratic leadership time and time again to schedule on the calendar time so we can debate the comprehensive energy bills that have been introduced. These bills are pending in the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, where I am now the ranking member. But the reality is we can't seem to move or get any time agreement or any priority in this body.

It is amazing that the emphasis seems to be blaming our President—a President who has proposed a methodology to fix it. He has developed from his energy task force report specific recommendations. One of the more interesting things is the manner in which some in the media are coming to the general assumption that there really isn't a shortage at all, and that this is something that has been trumped up by the oil industry, big oil, with the knowledge and support of the President.

How ridiculous, Mr. President. I have a chart here that shows why things are different, why this crisis exists. Anybody who suggests there is no crisis is not being realistic.

This is America's energy crisis today. It starts with our increased dependence on foreign oil. We are importing 56 percent of the total oil we consume in this country. In 1973, when we had gas lines around the block, when we had the Arab oil embargo, as a consequence of that, we were 37-percent dependent. We created a Strategic Petroleum Reserve. We felt that we never wanted to exceed 50 percent in imports because it would affect national security. Now we are 56-percent dependent and the Department of Energy says that it will be 66 percent by 2010.

Secondly, natural gas—which we have taken for granted for a long, long time—was about \$2.16 per thousand cubic feet 14 months ago. Today it is \$4, \$5, \$6. It has quadrupled. We are looking for electric energy from the resource of gas. So that has changed.

The nuclear industry—well, we haven't built a new nuclear plant in more than 10 years—nearly 20 years. We licensed a plant approximately 10 years ago. We are not doing anything in nuclear.

We are concerned about air quality and emissions and we are concerned about Kyoto, global warming, climate